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'God Gives You Signs'

07.03.2008 | Catholic, Faculty, Service and Giving Honors and scholars program coordinator and 2008 Marianist Service Award honoree Jill Talley seems to have a way of connecting with students.

Some come to her office on official business — turning in paperwork or getting something signed; others park on the couch in her office for a few minutes while they wait for their advisers' doors to open, sometimes intending nothing more than small talk. Before long, however, they're making a point of stopping in to visit anytime they're near the first floor of Alumni Hall.

Heidi Good Gauder, an associate professor in the Roesch Library and a 1990 honors program graduate, remembers doing the same.

"She put me at ease while I waited to talk to (history professor and then-program director) Pat Palermo about my coursework, the thesis and the usual academic stuff that causes angst," Gauder said. "She has such an easy way with people. ... She just seems to get the students of the program and knows how to work with them."

Talley, who came to UD in 1984, insists she's just doing what she's been taught her whole life.

"Being kind to others and treating others the way you want to be treated — I'm just doing what my parents taught me," Talley said. "God gave it to my parents, my parents gave it to me, I gave it to my children, and now, I teach it to my grandchildren."

The students who come into Talley's office are among UD's best and brightest undergraduates. When they're feeling stressed, when they're worked up about projects, presentations and deadlines, Talley's calming manner consistently brings them back to earth. But they give her much more, she said, and they aren't even aware of it.

"We talk," said Talley, who earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from UD in 1996 at Palermo's encouragement. "I like learning from these students. They are learning so much, and I love to listen to them talk about it."

The feeling appears to be mutual, Gauder said. Graduates call her, come back to visit, send her cards and e-mails and invite her to their weddings. Gauder and Talley meet once a month for lunch.

Father Paul Marshall, S.M., University rector, said that what Talley decided to do with her \$1,000 honorarium is an outstanding reflection of the Marianist charism.

"God gives you signs," Talley said. "I wanted to award it to a student from the Dayton Public Schools, but I didn't have anyone in mind at the time, so I told Father Paul we could just wait. Then Martell Gamble comes in my office to see (mechanical engineering professor) Drew Murray."

Gamble, a mechanical engineering major, resident assistant and vice president of the UD chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers, parked on the couch in Talley's office, waiting for Murray's door to open. While he waited, Talley struck up a conversation and found out Gamble had graduated from Meadowdale High School in the Dayton Public Schools. His principal there had been a teacher of Talley's at Roth High School, which is closed.

"He's an example of the Dayton Public Schools, and I'm proud of him for getting as far as he has," Talley said of Gamble, a co-op student with Toyota for the past three summers. Right then, she told him what she planned to do with her honorarium: give it to him to help pay for school.

"I told him, 'Fly like a bird. You'd be surprised where you might end up,'" Talley said. "I hope he will come back."

— Maureen Schlagen